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SACRED JOURNEY

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SACRED JOURNEY[®]

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

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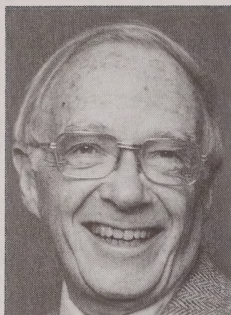
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Cover photo by Sara Wuthnow.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR



"It was a beautiful, inspiring experience!" "I look forward eagerly to the next one!" That's what virtually everyone said who attended the first Companions on the Sacred Journey conference in Princeton, in mid-June of last year. So, we began planning for the weekend of June 14, 15, and 16, in 2002.

We have already lined up many of your favorite workshop leaders, and we are happy and excited to announce that Gerald May, M.D., co-founder of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, an ecumenical organization supporting contemplative spirituality, has agreed to be a major keynote speaker.

"Jerry" May, a noted psychiatrist as well as spiritual guide and teacher, is the widely read author of *Addiction and Grace*, *Pilgrimage Home*, *Care of Mind Care of Spirit*, *Will and Spirit*, and *The Awakened Heart: Opening Yourself to the Love You Need*. You'll love him!

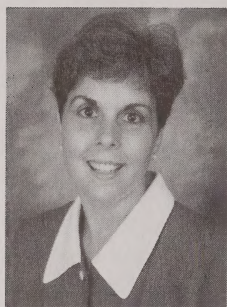
In the Wednesday evening prayer group at Fellowship in Prayer that I am involved with, we have been working recently on internalizing the most widely known Christian prayer of the heart, the Jesus prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner." For those of

us who believe in the innate goodness of all of God's children, rather than in the doctrine of original sin, it was extremely helpful to learn, from Dr. May's book *The Awakened Heart*, that "the word 'sinner' was not in the earliest form of the prayer, and that when it was introduced it referred not to an essential badness of persons but to 'missing the mark' as all of us are bound to do from time to time and that "the classical meaning of mercy . . . is kindness, graciousness, loving helpfulness."

It was also reassuring to read in *The Awakened Heart* that there is no need to be concerned about our form or style of prayer or whether or not we are "doing it right." "Prayer," Dr. May tells us, "can be anything from reciting words by rote, to pleading for help in desperation, to simple appreciation in the present moment." It really does not matter, he tells us. "Prayer is the only way we can integrate our intention with our dependance on grace."

What a treat it will be to hear and work with Jerry May at the Companions on the Sacred Journey conference in Princeton, June 14, 15, and 16, 2002! See you there!

LOVE NOTES



Two torn scraps of paper stay atop my desk: they are love notes from two of you—our devoted readers. Arlene from Virginia wrote, “A friend shared her copies with me. Frankly, there are certain issues of *SACRED JOURNEY* that should be canonized.”

See why I keep that note nearby as I work?

Sr. Therese Mary of Michigan penned in perfectly formed script: “My only negative comment is the journal’s brevity. I long for more! It whets my appetite.”

If something you read in each issue rings with the round resonance of truth and momentarily hangs in the air before settling in the regions of your soul, then the ever-deepening crease in my forehead from reading, typing, and redlining, is well earned. Better yet, if something you read propels you to your knees or meditation cushion, then our efforts are truly blessed. Rousing your appetite for the Real Thing motivates what we do here at *SACRED JOURNEY*.

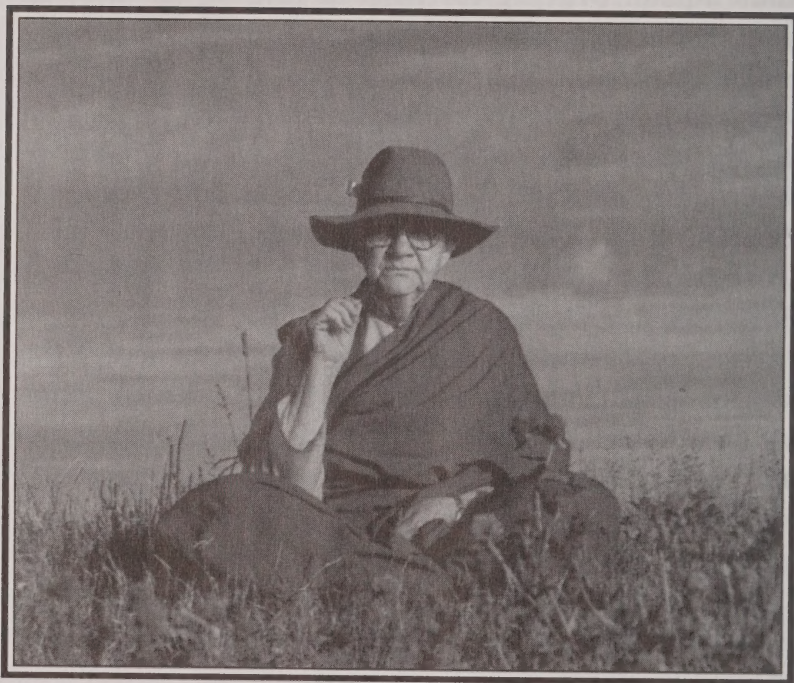
This month in *Questions & Answers*, we feature Trime Lhamo, a Buddhist nun and skillful meditation teacher who is also a friend and trustee of Fellowship in Prayer. Trime is one of those inimitable people who marks the

lives of those she knows. To help you catch a glimpse of her spirit and spunk, read the profile of her life, "A Buddhist Nun who Takes her Faith with a Grain of Salt."

With the coming of summer, June marks an annual passage for many. As the school year concludes, Suzanne Kelsey struggles to "map" the territory of loneliness as her oldest son graduates from high school leaving her to redefine significant relationships and beliefs in a new phase of life. In *A Transforming Experience*, Terry Suruda finds herself praying for help in finding an intimate relationship with God after years of pushing away the "unsmiling" God of her childhood. In *Spirituality and Everyday Life*, Susan Gregg-Schroeder searches out the right empty bowl to signify living with "openness, expectation, and anticipation." Michael True, author of "Some Call IT God," details his search to discover what to call "this thing," this being, this wonder, we in the West most often call God.

Wherever June finds you, we ask you to accept this issue of *SACRED JOURNEY* as a love note—a brief, incomplete, but heartfelt scrawl—sent to remind you that you matter and your questions and insights are welcomed here.

Trime Lhamo



Ani Nyinje Dorje

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Sitting on a Cushion

Trime Lhamo

Trime Lhamo is an ordained Buddhist nun and senior teacher of Tibetan Buddhism whose root teacher was Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. She has taught at Buddhist centers in Vermont, Florida, New Jersey, and at Pema Chodron's Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia. Trime is also an integral part of the wonderful warp and woof of Fellowship in Prayer. Whenever she drops by our offices, laughter will follow, for she is well-known for her wit and candor. For many years she has served as a trustee of our organization and has led a meditation group that meets here on weekends. (She's also been known to pull out a screwdriver and fix a broken door hinge when necessary.) Last summer during our first "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference, her workshop garnered rave reviews. One who attended put it well, "Trime is a delight and one of the funniest people I've ever met. I loved her, I could feel her peace and honesty."

During an editorial meeting last fall, we were discussing the current widespread interest in meditation. After Trime talked for a few moments, another committee member said, "Why not interview Trime?" Of course. She's been right here under our noses teaching us with her life. Now we introduce her to you as a wonderful meditation teacher. A full profile of her colorful life follows on page 20.

Rebecca Laird: What key questions or desires draw people to meditation?

Trime Lhamo: People want to find peace. They want to solve their problems. Sometimes they want to be connected to a group. Sometimes they are only interested intellectually in seeing what it is about. In the last five or six years meditation has become a household word. Everybody has some idea what meditation is.

How do you begin to teach someone to meditate?

First I explain that meditation has few built-in expectations. There is no guarantee that you are going to find a peaceful situation. Meditation in and of itself, as I know it, is not designed to produce any kind of altered state of mind. But meditation is an opportunity to get honest with yourself. I tell people right off that meditation is not something to talk about but something you do. You have to give yourself the gift of that time every day. The commitment is always to yourself, not to any religion or ideal.

Before I ever give meditation instruction, I always fall back on the essential teachings of the Buddha which is a compilation of pithy things the Buddha said that is published as a book called *The Dhammapada*, and there are many, many translations of it. I especially like the first two stanzas:

All that we are is a result of our thoughts, made up of our thoughts, founded on our thoughts. With our thoughts we make our world. If you speak or act with a harmful thought then sorrow follows you. . . . If one speaks or acts with a harmonious thought then happiness follows you.

As human beings the fact remains that we don't always have harmonious thoughts. The problems arise when we try to think that it is normal to feel resentful, revengeful, and to dislike people or situations, or to be dishonest and tell lies. We tell ourselves that this is what we have to do in the world today in order to survive. We convince ourselves that it is necessary in business to lie, cheat, and steal in order to be successful. From a Buddhist point of view this is not true. It is not true that you have to be dishonest or hypocritical to survive in this world.

As we sit on a cushion we begin to recognize our thought patterns. They are very much habitual patterns. In meditation you begin to see how a thought arises and begins to influence your entire physical being. Usually when a thought arises we act on it in some way. When you are sitting on a cushion and you are committed to sitting there for awhile, and a thought arises—say a thought of anger—what we do is examine that thought. After a while you are actually able to examine the emotion and look at it and if you don't feed it, it actually goes away. But often we feed our negative thoughts and bring in all sorts of goodies to the thought so we feel justified in feeling our anger. Still I am talking about sitting on a cushion in meditation. So if you continue sitting there the thought goes away without your doing anything. To experience it again you have to call it back. *What was I thinking? Oh, yes, that juicy thought I was having, it was so much fun.*

Essentially, we find out in meditation how we make ourselves uncomfortable in this life.

Where do our thought patterns come from? Do we create them?

No one has ever discovered where thoughts come from. Nor have we discovered where they go. If we pay attention we will see they are like clouds in the sky. They come. And if you watch a cloud you see it changes, disappears, and another one comes. So where do the clouds come from? Scientifically you could explain where the clouds come from, but that wouldn't change your experience. There is no cloud and then all of a sudden in a few minutes there might be a cloud. It is that way with your thoughts. Usually we are so lost in our thoughts that we don't know we are thinking, but as we get through the storm of habitual thoughts, we begin to see each individual thought. We think and act in certain habitual ways and never question our thoughts and actions.

When we act out of one of the five poisons: jealousy, pride, passion (a grasping emotion where you hold on to a negative thought), aggression, and ignorance (not stupidity, rather ignoring our thought patterns and never questioning them), we create our own unhappiness. We deny almost all the time that we have a part in our dissatisfaction. We are never going to change the world to make it fit our ideas of how it should be. We can change our attitude about the way it is. That is what we learn sitting on a cushion in meditation, day after day, week after week, month after month. What does develop in meditation is a sense of spaciousness. You actually begin to experience some space between the thought that develops and your reaction to that thought.

Are you saying that over time meditation creates enough mental space to give us choices about our attitudes and actions?

Absolutely, when you have clear mental space, you can stop for a moment before engaging in a spontaneous response. Say someone does something to you and your thought pattern associates that action with a previous thought pattern of unfairness or resentment and then you react today as you did in the past. If you have that clear mental space, and most of us don't, we can employ it and let the thought be what it is and let it go.

When we begin to recognize our thoughts, the way we react so quickly begins to seem absurd. We create such unhappiness for ourselves. I am not saying that other people don't cause us harm. Neither am I saying that we shouldn't stick up for ourselves in situations that are obviously unfair or unjust. Buddhism never tells you to give up your intelligence. It doesn't tell you to believe anything. When I give meditation instruction, I say, *You just have to come and sit and see what happens to you as you sit here quietly and without great expectations.* The only way you find out what meditation is all about is to experience it.

So if we begin without great expectation and make a commitment to sit still, then what do we do?

All meditation has an object. In other words, to get anyone's attention, a baby's, for example, you dangle something in front of the baby's face. In meditation there are many, many meditation objects depending on your teacher and school of Buddhism. Most of the time it is the breath. Breathing is something we do, and we can't manufacture it. You simply use it as an object for your attention. Right now, I am sitting here breathing, but if I were meditating, I would be aware of the fact that my breath was coming in and my breath was going out. My

breath is coming in . . . going out. In the midst of that coming in and going out thoughts do arise. The object is not to stop our thoughts, that is really impossible. The only thing you can do with your thoughts is to ignore them or examine them.

Why do I want to know all this is going on in my mind?

Because you are looking for something. Why are you looking for something? According to the Buddha's First Noble Truth, his first sermon after his enlightenment, the translation usually says: "Life is suffering." People usually hear that and say, "What a terrible thing to say that life is suffering." I like to say: Existence is dissatisfaction. There is always a niggling sense that life could be better. Something could be different and I could be happier. I would be more at peace if this were so. The Second Noble Truth is that there is a cause of this dissatisfaction. The cause of this dissatisfaction is our attitude, our thinking. In Buddhism, we talk about this as our view of life. We can deal with suffering if we find out the cause of our suffering is the way we are thinking about something. We make up a lot of stories about stuff that are not always true. Through meditation you learn to discriminate about what is the fact and what is your interpretation of that fact.

Let's go on to the Third Noble Truth: There can be a cessation to this dissatisfaction.

It sounds like there is hope.

Sounds like it. The essence of the Buddha's teachings can be summed up in two principles, the Four Noble Truths

and the Noble Eightfold Path. The first covers the side of *doctrine* and the primary response it elicits is understanding. The second covers the side of *discipline*, in the broadest sense of the word, and the primary response it calls for is *practice*.

The unity of these, the doctrine and the discipline, is what we Buddhists refer to as the *Dharma*. Doctrine or discipline? You can't separate them. To understand the doctrine you must practice the disciplines. The Four Noble Truths bring the teachings to life with the practice of the Eightfold Path. The ongoing result, rather than collecting a lot of intellectual knowledge, is increasing one's understanding and a continuous disclosure of the truth of our lives. The Eightfold Path is commonsense and doesn't differ much from what you find in every other religion. If I list these core teachings, perhaps what I am describing will become clearer:

Four Noble Truths (the first sermon of the Buddha)

1. The truth of suffering. We all experience dissatisfaction, discomfort, grief, sorrow, disappointment, despair, and complaints. We have a sense that things are never quite perfect, something always needs fixing.
2. The truth of the cause of suffering. Suffering has three root causes: greed, aversion, and delusion.
3. The cessation of suffering comes from looking deeply at causes, seeing our conceit, our jealousy, our ambition, pride, etc.
4. The Noble Eightfold Path provides an intentional way of living that transforms suffering.

Right View: seek to understand the Four Noble Truths.

Right Intention: investigate the intentions of our

actions and words.

Right Speech: do not lie or use harsh speech.

Right Action: give up unvirtuous or harmful actions.

Right Livelihood: do not kill, steal or lie to provide for your sustenance.

Right Effort: be diligent in the examination of actions.

Right Mindfulness: be aware of what you are doing at all times.

Right Concentration: practice meditation in order to learn how to master your discursive mind.

Get specific here. How does one embark on the Eightfold Path?

You begin with Right View, which is essentially acknowledging that everything, including ourselves, is empty of any inherent individuality. Everything that happens depends on something else. It's called interdependent origination. Every situation, every person is connected in some way. Nothing happens by accident. Things are not preordained. Things happen to us when proper causes and conditions come together at the right time.

After you have Right View, you focus on Right Intention. Most of us really don't know our intentions or motivations. So back to meditation. If we understand there is to be an examination of our intentions, we might start to look more deeply at *Why am I doing this? What do I hope to achieve? Do I want to make myself more powerful? Do I want to get my own way?* So we examine intention in meditation. Let's say you felt inclined to tell a lie. You'd begin to ask: *Am I trying to protect myself by telling this lie? Am I going to lie to make myself seem more important? Why do I find it necessary to tell this*

untruth I have not yet told? And, of course, sometimes we have to examine this in retrospect: *Why did I feel I had to lie?* You begin to get down to the nitty gritty of who you are. The real intention of practicing Buddhism is to cause no harm to others and to help others. But you have to go back and do all this self-analysis before you even get to that point. We do a lot of harm to others with our speech, sometimes intentionally, and other times unintentionally. In Buddhism, we actually take a precept (a vow) to use proper speech and not lie. We all tell little exaggerations, but we can stop doing that.

There are many things that start with meditation. It is really a vast subject. I think I will say for myself, that if I didn't start meditating, and I think I was forty or forty-one years old when I started, I would probably be dead.

Why do you believe meditation saved your life?

I drank a lot. I was frantic about my life. I always worked two jobs because I was afraid I would starve to death and that was not even a possibility. My mind was morbid, sad mind, depressed mind. I had no joy. Now I have a lot of joy. Life is not always good, and right, and beautiful, but underneath the turmoil, there is some joy. You might also say that joy equates to some sort of peacefulness. I think when you get to that state you begin to be more considerate of others.

Why did you start meditating?

My life was terribly disconnected. I didn't like my job. Nothing was going right. I had this idea, it just came to me, I should just sit down and be quiet. I had this little statue of a Buddha, someone gave it to me many, many

years ago, and I managed to hold onto it. I used to sit down with this little Buddha for five minutes which seemed like an eternity.

This was all self-initiated?

Yes, I hadn't read any books or anything. It just seemed the thing. I thought if I could just find some quiet, it would help. And you know when you first sit down you don't find much quiet because the mind is so busy, so frantic. I did that on and off for two or three months and then, one day, I saw an ad that said a Tibetan meditation group was starting.

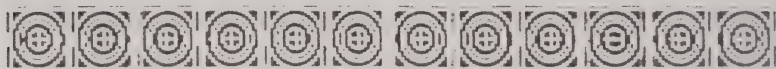
I joined and after about a year I went to Boulder, Colorado to meet Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a young lama who had recently come to the States from India. I found meditation was really ideal. I practiced intensely. I worked the afternoon shift so I spent the morning in meditation and study. Then I joined a group. We had weekly classes and to be a part of the group Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche insisted that you sit for nine hours every Sunday. We would sit for forty minutes and walk for ten minutes and do that in three hour blocks. If you didn't have a foundation in meditation, Trungpa Rinpoche did not want you to be a part of the group because you can't understand the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhism can be a very challenging intellectual path, but you can't understand the essence of Buddhism intellectually, it has to come out of meditation. There is no other way to get to it. Many people today say they are Buddhists but never do any meditation. It's like Christians who never pray. According to my understanding, Christianity is based on prayer and understanding the teachings of Christ. It's the same with Buddhism. If you don't

participate on a deeper level than an intellectual one, then it is very difficult to understand.

Do you have any last thoughts for our readers?

Every religion teaches us the kingdom is where? Ain't out there. So back to meditation. We have this pool of joy within us. But we fill it up with a lot of negativity. Through meditation we can recognize we are thinking in negative ways. If we are dwelling always in our complaining mind and can move beyond that, then life can actually be transformed. You may have the same problems, but they seem minor and don't overwhelm you. Once you make the discovery that you have the ability to do things differently than you have always done them, confidence arises.

I L L U M I N A T I O N S



When we practice *zazen* (Zen meditation) our mind always follows our breathing. When we inhale, the air comes into the inner world. When we exhale, the air goes out to the outer world. The inner world is limitless, and the outer world is also limitless. We say "inner world" or "outer world," but there is just one whole world. In this limitless world, our throat is like a swinging door. The air comes in and goes out like someone passing through a swinging door. If you think, "I breathe," the "I" is extra. There is no you to say "I." What we call "I" is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale. It just moves; that is all. When your mind is pure and calm enough to follow this movement, there is nothing: no "I," no world, no mind nor body; just a swinging door.

~*Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*

I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.

~*Albert Schweitzer*

Not mere talk about water, nor the mere sight of a spring, but an actual mouthful of it gives the thirsty complete satisfaction.

~*D.T. Suzuki, Essays in Zen Buddhism*

If we do a little of one kind of practice and a little of another, the work we have done in one often doesn't continue to build as we change to the next. It is as if we were to dig many shallow wells instead of one deep one. In continually moving from one approach to another, we are never forced to face our own boredom, impatience, and fears. We are never brought face to face with ourselves. So we need to choose a way of practice that is deep and ancient and connected with our hearts, and then make a commitment to follow it as long as it takes to transform ourselves.

~Jack Kornfield, A Path with Heart

Prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer. Warmth of heart cannot make up for it.

~Simone Weil, Waiting for God

A Buddhist Nun Who Takes Her Faith With a Grain of Salt



Rebecca Laird

It has been said: If you ask a Buddhist child to locate the mind, the child will point to the center of the chest, near the heart. If you ask an American child to locate the mind, the child will point to the temple, near the brain. When asked a similar question, Venerable Bhikshuni Trime Lhamo, an American-born Buddhist nun ordained in the Tibetan tradition, replies, "Every religion teaches us the kingdom is where?" She points away from herself, "Ain't out there! It's in here," she says waving her hands from her head to her heart.

Thirty years ago, while living in Miami, Bhikshuni Trime Lhamo (her first name means "fully ordained" and the last name means "without stain" in Tibetan), then known by her birth name of Nettie Lou Poling, was drinking too much and disliked her job as a lab technician. She felt her life was disconnected and joyless. Trime says, "I had this idea. It just came to me that I should just sit down and be quiet. I had this little statue of the Buddha someone gave to me many, many years ago and I managed to hold onto it. I used to sit down with this little Buddha for five minutes which seeme like an eternity."

Rebecca Laird is the editor of SACRED JOURNEY.

A few months later, Trime picked up a magazine in a doctor's waiting room while waiting for a friend. Trime saw an ad for a Tibetan meditation group and it had a phone number to call. She recalls, "I got this sense in my tummy." Three days later the gnawing in her gut remained. She searched out a copy of the magazine and made the call. Several days later she and five others met in a woman's home to listen to the tapes of a young lama, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (Rinpoche means "precious one") who recently had come to the United States from India.

In 1979 Trime left her medical career to study at the Vajradhatu Seminary in Lake Louise, Canada. She went on to Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia, where she returns each summer as a senior teacher. There she was first ordained as a novice who took thirty-six precepts or vows. The basic precepts prohibit killing sentient beings—anything with consciousness—stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and using intoxicating substances.

In 1988 she became fully ordained and vowed to live by 348 precepts, which include admonitions such as not eating at unregulated times or handling money. Trime says the precepts are not rules but choices that allow her to examine her daily actions mindfully. Western nuns often struggle to appropriately apply all of the precepts that were first applied by wandering solitaries in a rural, agrarian society.

When Trime began meditating thirty years ago, she spent a lot of time explaining the basics to people who weren't sure what she was doing. Times have changed. "In the last five or six years meditation has become a household word," Trime acknowledges. "Thirty years ago meditation was some weird thing that weird people did. Meditation wasn't a part of common knowledge."

This increased interest in meditation has opened new teaching venues for Trime. As a renunciant, Trime lives without financial security and is dependent upon the generosity of others. She lives with her three dogs and one cat in a room supplied by lay Buddhist practitioners in Kendall Park, New Jersey, and goes wherever she is asked to teach meditation practice in the Vajrayana (Tibetan) tradition.

Each Thursday Trime teaches adapted meditation techniques at the Senior Center of South Brunswick. On a recent Thursday morning, a dozen seniors, ten men and two women, sat in a circle on maroon vinyl-covered chairs as Trime taught them to breathe—inhale for four counts, hold it for seven counts, exhale for eight. As Trime reminded them of this pattern she asked, “Did anyone see Oprah on Monday? Some stress reduction specialist was teaching the very same thing on television.” No one saw Oprah, but they’d been listening to Trime. One woman said, “I was practicing the energizing breathing on the couch and my husband said, ‘What’s wrong with you?’” Everyone laughed knowingly. Energizing breathing sounds a lot like hyperventilating, but produces a burst of energy when needed to complete a task. For the final fifteen minutes of the hour-long session, everyone sat with feet on the floor and breathed normally, concentrating on the movement of breath—in and out. The muffled sound of voices in the Center’s nearby reception room and the fidgeting of one woman who simply couldn’t sit still, did not mar the deepening quiet. When Trime called everyone back together, one woman’s head remained bowed—she was completely relaxed and sound asleep.

As the group gathered to leave, conversation centered on all of the delayed construction needs at the Center.

"They always put the seniors at the bottom of the list," one man blurted out. Trime lets the conversation run briefly, then asked, "Is this Complaining Mind? Does this conversation take us out of the present perfect moment?"

Annually for the past five years Trime has taught Buddhism to high school seniors at Lawrenceville School. A long-time friend of Trime's recalls having lunch last May along Princeton's Nassau Street. When graduates from Lawrenceville Prep saw Trime they thronged to her. The friend recalls, "They were delighted. They obviously thought she was cool."

Brian Madison, a seminary intern from Princeton Theological Seminary serving Pennington Presbyterian Church, recently arranged for Trime to address an adult education class on the "Great Faiths." He said many present had "no prior idea what Buddhism was about." Brian recalled, "Trime takes her Buddhism with utmost sincerity and a grain of salt." When she talked about nonviolence and the Eightfold Path—the way Buddhists seek the cessation of suffering by looking at the cause of suffering and practicing banishing negative emotions through meditation—she brought the "walk and talk" together.

When dressed in her saffron and crimson robes with a short-cropped stubble of hair and while teaching an ancient form of meditation, no one would guess that this seventy-something-year-old woman was born a coal miner's daughter in the heart of West Virginia and once served as a WAC in the Women's Army Corps before trying her hand as a beautician, a bartender, a cow wrangler in the southwest and as a hospital lab technician in Florida.

Trime recently talked to a visitor, one of the many individuals each year who set up appointments with her

to better understand meditation. When asked, "What happens when you meditate?" Trime replied, "Even the Buddha said, 'Don't believe what I say. Hear what I say and give it a try and make your own evaluation.' You just have to come and sit and see what happens to you as you sit here quietly and without great expectation. The only way you find out what meditation is all about is to experience it."

As she instructs, Trime spices her teaching with generous portions of dry wit and personal verification: "Before I began to meditate, I thought people were completely unfriendly. It's funny how people got friendlier over the years, even New Yorkers. How did that happen? By tuning in to your own mind and being more honest with yourself and others, you begin to see the world in a different light. You begin to see people in another light."

Before bidding her visitor goodbye, she reaches toward the table and picks up a single piece of paper to read a story from the Indian tradition. "One day it is said a little musk deer went to his granny musk deer and said, 'I smell a haunting fragrance. Where is it coming from?' The deer is sent off to smell the animals in the forest to learn if the scent comes from any of them. The musk deer goes to the lions, tigers, bears, fish, elephants—all the animals in the forest—unsuccessfully seeking the scent. When he returns his Granny just smiles wisely and picks up his own paw. "The musk deer gave it a sniff and gave out a cry of joy. It comes from me. It comes from me."

Bhikshuni Trime Lhamo stops when the story ends and silently points toward herself. "Do you understand? The story takes us back to meditation." We may search elsewhere but will repeatedly discover, she says, "It comes from me."

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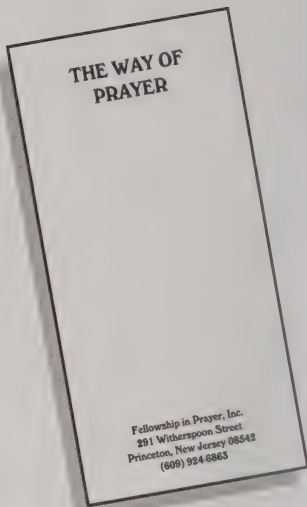
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SPIRITUALITY & THE FAMILY



Mapping the Territory of Loneliness

Suzanne Kelsey

The week before our son Jesse's high school graduation open house, I spent several days sorting through old photographs. I found my favorites of Jesse. There he was, a newborn in his fuzzy yellow pajama sleeper. In another photo at age five, he stands against a tree in his white tux with the grey cummerbund preparing to bear the rings at a former babysitter's wedding. At six, he hugs his little brother, Keegan, just before leaving for his first day of kindergarten with his new pack snuggled on his back. At eight, he clowns in sunglasses.

As I sifted through the photos, memories from those early years filled my mind. Chuck and I lived with our two sons in the country on a hill overlooking a fertile Iowa River valley. We flew kites in the pasture next to our house and took picnics across the road to a wooded area by the river. We sledged and skated in winter and watched Jess protect his younger toddler-brother from falls.

In those days, we held jobs, not careers, and we spent our spare time in play with friends and family. Though

Suzanne Kelsey is currently writing a memoir about her experiences as a working mother and the need for the workplace to accommodate employees who seek time for family and other interests. She also teaches writing and literature at a community college and plays saxophone in a jazz band for sheer fun. She lives in Iowa.



Robert Campbell

this garden of Eden had its prickly patches, it was definitely a simpler time.

Now, there are competing priorities. As working professionals, we find that the people we serve take a great share of our time. During the school year, my community college students take much of my energy. Chuck's work as a minister seems to expand with each year as the church grows.

Sifting through the photos in late May, the week before my son's graduation, I smiled and cried. Empty-nest syndrome is not nearly an adequate enough phrase for my sadness. And the questions: Who am I now that intensive mothering is no longer necessary? What is my relationship with my husband to be like now? To my friends? To my work?

I feel I am in a twilight zone of sorts: an eerie, familiar but different place. The map of my life is no longer functional. My landmarks have changed and I am confused. It seems I am destined to travel this unmarked landscape alone, as Chuck does not seem to share my sadness.

Books and ideas are the food for my soul, but because of our busyness, I have, at times, been able to 'eat' only sparingly. I have always felt guilty about reading from a book during the middle of the day when concrete tasks like students' papers or housework clamored for my attention. I have had limited contact with others who share my love of ideas: small snatches over lunch with colleagues, an occasional discussion with friends after an author reads at the local bookstore. The book-and-idea marker, I am certain, is struggling to be prioritized in my life.

My body wants recognition as a marker on my new landscape map. I want to accept my body for its changing qualities: new wrinkles, drying skin. I also want to nurture

myself through: regular exercise, yoga for muscles not stretched for two decades, and a more nutritious diet.

I've been too busy to get involved politically except via consciousness-raising with my students. Now I see a shift from caring for my family's needs in practical ways to wanting to care for people in a more political way. I am passionate about the need for the workplace to make more concessions to the needs of employees to balance family and other passions with work-for-pay. I want to use my skills to make contributions in that arena.

Writing and immersing myself in nature are two primary ways I can access the spiritual realm. In order to support Chuck's work, I have sometimes placed priority instead on trying to find spiritual expression through the church. I believe that exploration outside the traditional framework of the church waits to become a marker on my map.

I worry that some of these new landmarks will make my territory so different from Chuck's that we won't travel together anymore. We may come to live as disinterested roommates, each involved in his or her own priorities. The glue of our sons will be less strong than in the past. Will we pull apart permanently? Will my spiritual explorations take me away from the church, my husband's absorbing passion? Will my immersion in the world of ideas repel him, a man whose Methodist theology favors work—practical, concrete solutions to the needs of the poor and disinherited—over mystical transcendence? I worry that my new landmarks will cause me to travel further from my life's partner.

My soul is telling me that my territory needs to be remapped; new markers need to be drawn. I find courage from a poem shared by a friend. Called, "The Guest House," the poem was written or perhaps spoken and

later transcribed in the thirteenth century by a mystical Persian poet named Rumi:

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

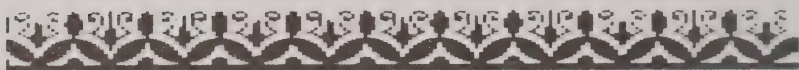
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

As my house is violently swept of its furniture, the familiar trappings of motherhood, I tell myself to be grateful for whoever and whatever comes. The guide beyond surely knows what she is doing.

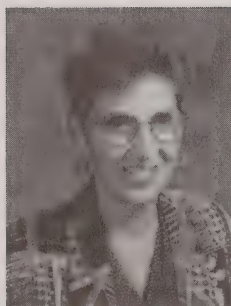
A TRANSFORMING EXPERIENCE



A Second Chance at Intimacy

With God

Terry Suruda



I spent a long time away from God. The church and I had a rift that lasted for many years. But my anger at God turned to wonder as a series of well-planned “coincidences,” led me to return to God, to church and a welcoming community.

All seemed well, everything was falling into place, and I felt I had been given a wonderful gift, a second chance to come to intimacy with a loving, intimate God. The God of my childhood was angry and punishing, watching and keeping record of all I did. Images of that unsmiling God surfaced during moments of prayer. I asked God for help. I asked God to show me the truth about himself. (Herself would have to wait.)

The next Sunday after I received communion, I quietly sat in my place following the Taize chants, enjoying the

Terry Suruda is a middle school math teacher, a member of the Episcopal Church, and a student in its Deacon Formation program. She lives in New Jersey.

peace of the moment. My eyes followed one of our parishioners, holding his little daughter as he walked to the altar rail.

He is English, friendly though reserved, seemingly motivated more by heart than head, and is not the one person I would use as my role model for God as father. But there he was with his little girl asleep so peacefully on his shoulder, cradling, hugging, and rocking her as he took communion and walked back to his place. I could not stop watching them. I would love to be held so lovingly by a father. "You are," I heard from deep within me.

Some days later I was in my car driving through a residential neighborhood and stopped at a red light. My attention was pulled to the front yard of one of the development houses where a little girl wearing the dirt of her day was riding around on her tired-looking, round-bellied father's back. He put her down; she chased him. Both of them were laughing and screaming. She again climbed on his back. As I waited for the red light to change, I watched her face fill with joy and delight and listened to her laughter as she and her smiling father played this ritual together. The light changed and I drove away, my side-view mirror now framing the scene as their joy pervaded my car.

Weeks later I was sitting in a large New York City church with a friend waiting for her to finish her after-service visiting. The church is a tourist attraction, so people were walking around, looking at the beautiful windows and statues. I focused on a family of four. The mother was wheeling a baby in a stroller and was engrossed in all there was to see. She took time to enjoy each detail while her baby slept. The father, a small man, dealt with the too-big-to-carry, tired and cranky son. He lifted him

and carried him, walking around the church while his wife enjoyed the religious art. Three times he circled the church waiting for his wife. He was starting the fourth circle when she finished. Then they left together.

The season changed and I was on a camping trip with friends, out for a morning walk with my dog while the others slept. I thought I'd use this special private time for some quiet prayer and reflection and was annoyed to find ahead of me on the path a young father with his five-year-old daughter. Worse than their presence was her shrill whining. "Are we there yet? . . . My feet hurt. . . I'm tired. . . I have a stone in my shoe. . . I'm hot. . . I'm thirsty. . . There's another stone in my shoe." It never ended, her whining. It never ended, his patience.

He stopped to check her shoe. He wiped her head. He gave her a drink of water. He fixed her shoe again. Each time he gently reached down offering his hand for her to hold. I don't remember him saying a word.

Later I saw them down by the river. He was standing on the rocks in the water. She was shrieking with delight, splashing at the cool water's edge. He smiled at her and held out his hand, inviting her to join him on the rocks.

I am aware sometimes, because of these memories, that there is a Holy One who is my father. He is holding me always, whether I am playful or cranky, afraid or happy, awake or asleep. No matter what he will always be there, his arms will carry me and his hand will reach for me, ever-present, smiling, accepting, loving.

God. Abba. Father.

P O E T R Y



In the Center

Danna Faulds

I thought for years
the best that I could do
was to simply make a
connection with You.

"Lord," I prayed, "Let me rest
in Your presence today," as if
You were out there, separate
and apart from my small spirit.
To sense any connection at all,
was the greatest of God's gifts.

And now, shaken awake
by this intense tectonic shift,
experiencing essence,
I know that at the sweet
center of every human
flower there You are.

To call upon Your presence
is for the blossom to ask
for color and scent—but
I do call when I forget,
and, remembering, rest
again in the center of all things.

Danna Faulds is a writer and librarian living in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts.

Lectio

Wendy Turner Swanson

I read with my feet the dimpled page
whose margins compass creek and jetty
dune and sea. The readings for the year's
first day lie open to the sky.

Basalt pebbles make star maps or braille
or whole notes for a slow, ecstatic fugue.
A shower of tiny hailstones salts the jellyfish
gleaming like eggs the moonlight laid
in last night's watery nest.

Sinuuous sea grass spells out the names of God
across the borderlands of shoreline and season.
Here's the verse that shimmers:
a one-inch heart-shaped rock
with a whole in its chest.

Wandering and breathing are my only prayers.
I finger a salty cross over my brow
and lay bare my many-chambered heart
to let the words be written there.

Wendy Turner Swanson lives with her family in Portland, Oregon where she teaches first grade.



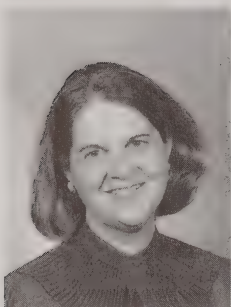
Robert Campbell

SPIRITUALITY & EVERYDAY LIFE



The Singing Bowl

Susan Gregg-Schroeder



I was looking for a bowl. It wasn't an urgent or frantic search. In fact, I wasn't even sure what kind of bowl I was looking for. I trusted that when the right bowl crossed my path, I would recognize it.

The whole bowl thing got started after I read Sue Bender's book, *Everyday Sacred*. She used the image of a Zen Buddhist monk's begging bowl. Each day the monk would go out with an empty bowl. Whatever was placed in that bowl would be the day's nourishment. I liked the idea of approaching each day this way, as if we held an empty bowl in our hands and continually lived with a sense of openness, expectation, and anticipation that at the end of the day, our bowl would contain wonderful and unexpected surprises.

My family knew I was looking for a bowl that I planned to use as the focal point of a worship center for an upcoming retreat. Over the past few months, my

Susan Gregg-Schroeder serves as Minister of Pastoral Care and Spiritual Formation of First United Methodist Church of San Diego. She and her husband, Stan, are parents of two grown children.

children and husband proudly pointed out bowls they thought would be perfect. There was a slight look of hurt in their eyes when I explained that their bowls “didn’t speak to me.”

One day my husband and I were visiting a quaint town with a multitude of unusual stores. I left him in the bookstore and wandered down the street knowing I would have lots of time to browse. For some unexplained reason I was drawn into a rather dark and musty oriental art store. As I wandered among the figures of Buddha, the Hindu gods and goddesses, and rugs of every size, color, and design, I was drawn to some dusty brass bowls.



Michael Christensen

They were various sizes but stacked on top of one another, all having the same proportions. A round wooden stick near the bowls was imprinted with the words, "Do not remove from the store."

Curious about the bowls, I sorted through the stack until I found one that fit my hand. The weight and rustic discoloration made me think I had found my bowl. Then picking up the wooden stick, I tapped the side of my bowl and it rang out the most enchanting tone.

By this time a woman had mysteriously emerged from behind the rugs and explained that I was holding a Tibetan singing bowl. She politely took the hardwood stick and showed me how to run it around the outside edge of the bowl to make it 'sing.' The bowl vibrated in my hand as it sang to me for the longest time, the tone still soft yet crystal clear as I held it next to my ear. I knew I had found my bowl.

The bowl must be kept empty. If I were to fill it with my trinkets and treasures, it would cease to sing or nourish me.

Some Call IT God



Michael True

"All the names we use for the fire at the heart of matter are risky. God, Yahweh, Creator, Allah, Manitou, . . . each comes freighted with a long, compromising history." ~Scott Russell Sanders

I grew up in Southwest Oklahoma on a great stretch of flat land between the lowly Wichita Mountains and the Red River. My mother, Agnes Murphy, faithfully Catholic as she lived among her Protestant in-laws, sent me to parochial school. In Southern Baptist country, Catholicism provided me an entree into history, distant lands, and cultures.



A conscientious altar boy, I loved the special liturgies during Holy Week. Later, when sex (oh my) entered the scene, a kindly parish priest heard my confession in the sacristy before Mass; cleansed, I was free to receive Holy Communion until the next time.

For years, the Christian concept of God seemed adequate,

Michael True, author of An Energy Field More Intense Than War: The Nonviolent Tradition and American Literature (1995), has also written for Commonweal, America, and Harvard Divinity Bulletin.

even when the self-conscious Catholicism of New England, where I eventually settled, struck me as less than religious. More recently I lived in China for a year and later, India.

Since then, the matter of naming God has become problematic. Is the word "God" adequate in identifying the concept? Or does the word function as an impediment to spiritual insight and development?

After spending considerable time among Daoists, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and others of deep religious faith and learning more through interreligious dialogue, I am uncertain what to call that Being once known only as "God."

<i>In you are all God's faces, forms, and aspects.</i>	Gradually I saw my quest as an attempt to get around what Christopher Isherwood, English novelist and Vedantist, called a "semantic block against words." Did language such as "savior, heaven, redemption, salvation" belong only to earlier stages of understanding? Or was my block merely the fall-out from too many thoughtless sermons and boring lectures?
--	---

Not surprisingly, the questions multiplied as my appreciation for other religious traditions grew. I began to wonder: Is our Western "God" inclusive or exclusive? Does God's name allow for a being who encompasses the many qualities and attributes that one associates with the ground of all being? More importantly does it evoke my experience and deepest awareness of the divine? Fifty years ago, Howard Brinton said that figures of speech such as "light, power," and "seed of the kingdom" may be more appropriate than "God" if the word has come to imply a top-down management entity who hurls into hell anyone who challenges his super-macho authority.

Does our image of what Gerald Heard once termed, "that thing" remain Miltonesque, too like the hero of *Paradise Lost*, who overpowered adversaries, not by disarming them or by the nonviolent use of faith, courage, or reason but simply by annihilating them on "the plain of heaven?" Can we even approach knowing God as long as our knowledge is circumscribed by designations or traditions that are mainly monarchical, sexist, or imperial? Feminist theologians have raised similar questions to those raised by my experience in Asia, where the attributes of the Supreme Being appear to be more diverse and inclusive. Many questions remain.

Is our ability to know God impeded by our failure to define that entity as more multifarious than our native language and predominantly Western culture allow? Are other names—Allah, Brahman, Atman, Yahweh, T'ien, Shang'ti, Creator Spirit—more appropriate for our experience of an immanent/transcendent being? Is it not time, in a period of extensive interreligious dialogue, to examine the context in which we have "known" God in the West and to question our iconography?

The Quaker tradition, among others, suggests that we know God primarily and best in silence. As Isaac Pennington, a 17th Century Friend wrote, "The end of words is to bring us to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter." Fortunately, according to Denise Levertov's poem, "Suspended," our security does not depend on us alone: "For though I claw at empty air and feel/nothing, no embrace/I have not plummeted."

The attempt to name God is, of course, an ancient and traditional preoccupation among philosophers and theologians. Hans Kung, the prolific theologian, suggests that much of the traditional conflict between Eastern and Western

philosophy results from Christian misrepresentations or misunderstandings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Jack Miles, author of *God: A Biography*, says that many of us have simply internalized that elemental and conflicting figure in the drama of our own lives to the exclusion of other divine characters among the world's religions.

In my ongoing inquiry, I found the insights of Shankara, an 8th Century Hindu saint, particularly helpful. In a famous prayer, Shankara speaks of a "dweller within, seed and source of the scriptures," whom logic cannot discover, but whom yogis know in meditation:

In you are all God's faces, forms, and aspects.
In every heart you are; and if but once
a person opens a mind to receive you,
truly, that person is free forever.

Since our minds are variously constituted and our experiences differ, our concepts of the divine differ. Perhaps as our insights proceed and new experiences of the divine unfold, we may yet discover new languages and images that allow for a deeper understanding of mysteries that we once assumed were beyond knowing. The late Swami Bhuteshananda argued in a similar vein that God becomes real to us only "to the degree that divine qualities are manifested in ourselves." This insight complements Jesus' statement that "the kingdom of God" is within you. Kabir's marvelous poem echoes this truth:

I laugh when I hear that the fish
in the water is thirsty.
You wander restlessly from forest
to forest while the Reality
is within your own dwelling.

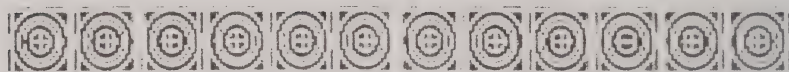
Recognizing the limitations of human speech, I realize that my effort to find a name for "the ultimate ground of all existence" may continue for the rest of my life. Along the way, this aphorism from the Rig Veda serves as a tentative guide: "Truth is One; the wise call it by many names."

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BOOKS WE'VE ENJOYED



Blossoms of the Dharma: Living as a Buddhist Nun, edited by Thubten Chodron. Published by North Atlantic Book © 1999, 208 pages, paperback.

Lying Awake: A Novel by Mark Salzman. Published by Alfred A. Knopf © 2000, 181 pages, hardcover.

Sister John of the Cross, the main character in *Lying Awake*, lives as a Carmelite nun in a convent outside of Los Angeles and is blessed with a visionary gift of pure awareness. As a child she recalls lying awake and watching the sun stream through her bedroom window. She would focus on the beam of light, then refocus on the specks of dust scattered in the air. She remembers, "Switching perspectives like that kept the mystery fresh."

Reading two books, one a spare, lyrical tale of a Catholic sister, the other, the true accounts by sixteen Buddhist nuns seeking to translate a living tradition rooted in ancient India and the Sanskrit language to the West, provided a similar fresh look at monastic life.

The Carmelites retreat to a cloister to live a life of ordered prayer and devotion to Christ. An "extern" nun serves the community as purchasing agent and point of contact with the outside world. Conversely, the earliest bhikshunis, fully ordained Buddhist nuns, lived according to the Buddha's instruction to "wander solitary as a rhinoceros." Today's Buddhist nuns in the West are often left on their own after

ordination to secure life's basics. Sometimes forced to hold down day jobs, Buddhist nuns in the West struggle to live the mendicant lifestyle devoted to meditation in our society where economic independence is a cardinal expectation.

Westerners also find the life of obedience a challenge. Bhikshuni Ngawang Chodron, British by birth and presently developing a nunnery for Tibetan nuns in Nepal writes, "Early in their training, the [Chinese] nuns are taught to stand like a candle, walk like the wind, sit like a bell, and sleep like a bow." She found the level of obedience challenging to emulate as a Westerner taught to think for herself.

On her first day in the convent Sister John, wanting to fully embrace her chosen life, is shown her room and once there she tries to meditate. "She closed her eyes and tried to empty her mind of all that was not God, but found that it was like trying to empty an ocean: where do you put the water?"

To her question, if their paths were to cross, Khandro Rinpoche would say, "Do not be rigid or worry unnecessarily about doing things wrong. Whatever you do—talking, sleeping, practicing—allow spontaneity to arise. From spontaneity comes courage. This courage enables you to make an effort to learn each day, to remain within the arising moment, and then the confidence of being a practitioner will emerge within you."

These two books differ widely in style and perspective, but together they point to a way of life embraced by women from varied cultures and languages who share the desire to make spiritual practice the center of their lives.

~Rebecca Laird

P R A Y E R S



[How Like You, O Lord]

Chet Corey

How like you,
O Lord,
that as I descend
each ladder rung,
from intellect
to heart,
that I ascend to you.
O Lord.

How like you,
O Lord,
that in the chambers
of my heart
you have made
your bed & placed,
O Lord,
your easy chair.

You leave the door ajar
& the night light lit.
Even though I come
midday, I find you in
& listening.

Chet Corey is a Covenant Affiliate of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, (LeCrosse, WI). He lives in Bloomington, Minnesota.

You know my footstep
as if it were my name.
Forgive me,
O Lord,
for when I do not come,
when I forget
that in your mansion
of many rooms,
you have made a room
within each of us.

An Actor's Psalm

Charles Geroux

Thank you, Lord,
for the newness of morning
and the wonder of life—
for bud and bloom and blessing.

Thank you for crafting life
so dramatically and abundant
For being conscious of the cues
that bring your presence to
the stage of sight.
For the wings: of duck, goose, swan, dove
crow, hawk and pheasant.

The stage-hand artistry: of wind, rain, sleet, snow
fog, mist, hail, frost, dew-dazzle and torrent.

The back drops: of sunset, clear sky-blue and cloudy fushia
the cirrus circus and cumulus clowning.

The act-curtain opening on each day's
all seeming significance—us, center stage
in our melodrama scene.

Accompanied by the lonesome, solo, five-note chorus
of the morning mourning dove.

Who patiently waits the moon-cue closing of the day-play.

We thank you, Lord, for the play, the playing
the play-acting—you are not pretend.
You are **make believe**.

Charles Geroux has worked in theatre for more than thirty years as actor, director, scene designer, playwright, and teacher. He currently teaches acting, speech, and stagecraft at Cranbrook Schools in Michigan.

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